The One Who Is with Us

John 14:16

January 15, 2017

At the beginning of the New Year, several television programs were broadcast concerning the Imperial Household, introducing episodes related to the present Emperor. When the Fukushima nuclear accident occurred and high-ranking officials from foreign countries began evacuating from Tokyo to distant locations, the government inquired through the Imperial Household Agency about the Emperor's wishes. The Emperor stated that, as a symbolic emperor, the most important thing was to remain with the people, and he firmly expressed his resolve to stay in Tokyo.

As a pastor who has been educated to believe that all people are equal, I do not think the imperial system itself is an ideal institution, nor do I believe that every emperor in history has been outstanding. Yet I have been deeply moved by the present Emperor's sincerity—for example, when he, together with the Empress, rushed to disaster areas during the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Kumamoto Earthquake, kneeling on the floors of evacuation centers to speak with evacuees. He frequently used the phrase "together with the people" and acted out the meaning of "symbol" in profound ways. At least in his case, one cannot help but recognize him as an admirable person. Quietly I confess: compared with other royal families abroad, which are often marred by scandalous gossip, there is even a sense of pride.

During World War II, when all Westerners were required to leave Japan, there was a single American missionary woman who resolved, "I will remain in Japan and live with the Japanese people." At a time when even ordinary Japanese were struggling for food, it is not hard to imagine the severe hardship she endured. She often recounted how she survived on small bits of food secretly brought by little girls. I myself heard this story many times from one of those "little girls," who later became an elderly pastor. Our present Hachioji Church exists because of such sacrificial devotion.

On the other hand, I recall a pastor serving in a city of Tohoku who fled at once when the possibility of radioactive contamination was raised. Another pastor who supported this action wrote about it as if it were a commendable deed. I felt deep shame that a

shepherd would abandon the people of the land he was sent to, leaving behind his own congregation.

☆ When Christ was born, God gave Him the title "Immanuel," which means, "God with us." Though He was the Creator of all things, He laid aside His divine power, took on the form of a helpless man, lived among people as one of them, and shared life with them. This was so that He might fully experience human pain, sorrow, hardship, and suffering, and thus become the perfect High Priest before God—the intercessor who understands. Christ is the Mediator who has tasted human pain.

We too are sent into this world as ambassadors of Christ, or His representatives. It is vital that we live among the people of the land to which we are sent, as Christ did. Even if that life involves suffering and pain, we must be conscious that we live as ambassadors of Christ, sharing in His sufferings by remaining with people in their struggles and proclaiming the redeeming gospel.

When we understand that the sufferings of life are for the glory of Christ, we no longer feel suffering as suffering, nor pain as pain; instead, we can experience them as joy and honor. Paul declared, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed."

The Christ who was crucified and buried rose again on the third day and, before returning to heaven, left us with these words: "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Christ is the God who remains with us even now. More than that, through the Holy Spirit, He dwells within us. We who were once fallen, cast out from God, and walking the path of destruction, have now been accepted by God, made to live with Him, and even granted the privilege of hosting God within us. Cleansed by the blood of Christ, God Himself dwells within us and becomes our strength for living.

Because God lives within us, we must understand more deeply the profound meaning and weight of this truth. We must cherish it, live upon this reality, and shape our lives upon this spiritual foundation. We are no longer merely human beings; we are human beings who carry God within us.

Through the indwelling God, we can express more richly, more clearly, and more vividly our nature as human beings created in God's image.

What makes this possible is our trust in God, and the willingness and determination that flow from that trust. Let us place our confidence in the God who dwells within us, and live lives that are pleasing to Him.